

New Capitol police commander stresses communication skills

CAPITAL-GAZETTE

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Rebecca Labs knows it sounds cliché, but it was her desire to help people that drew her to law enforcement. The youngest of seven siblings, Labs was always quelling conflicts and opening communication among family members, she said. The 46-year-old married, mother of two, has brought those skills to her new job as the commander of the Maryland Capitol Police's Annapolis Detachment.

Labs, of Davidsonville, was named the detachment's commander last week by Maryland Department of General Services Secretary and Maryland Capitol Police Chief Michael Wilson. Recently promoted to lieutenant, Labs is the first woman to lead the unit. She'd served as acting commander since January.

Labs oversees more than 60 police officers -- security guards responsible around-the-clock for 19 buildings, 10 parking garages and surface lots in the Annapolis Capital Complex. During the legislative session, the area frequently becomes a hotbed of political debate with rallies and demonstrations generally with opposing sides on any given issue.

This past session, Labs oversaw more than 40 rallies and demonstrations.

"You have to have excellent communication skills regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the argument," Labs said. "If you don't have the communication or compassion it takes to talk to people, you're not going to be successful."

The job also requires communication between agencies. The detachment will work with Annapolis, Anne Arundel and state police on any given event, Labs said.

"We needed a personality," said Wilson, the agency's chief. "We really needed someone with the ability to be a leader - and she had it."

Before coming to the detachment last spring, Labs retired at the rank of sergeant from the Maryland-National Capital Police Department in Prince George's County after 23 years of service.

Maryland Capitol Police falls within the state's Department of General Services. The agency also provides law enforcement and security to state buildings in Baltimore.